

28 JUN 1971

Approved For Release 2001/03/04 : CIA-RDP80-016

Storm Over Leaked Documents—

SECRET DECISIONS THAT
ALTERED THE VIETNAM WAR

STATINTL

Impact of Pentagon's massive analysis of the Government's policy-making processes on Vietnam—disclosed by "The New York Times"—extends far beyond the war itself.

In the published documents: recommendations and judgments at high levels, showing how the nation's vast military commitments in the Indo-China conflict took shape.

A FUROR over publication of secret material on step-by-step escalation of the U. S. role in Vietnam has taken on far-reaching proportions.

The controversy was triggered on June 13 when "The New York Times" began printing a series of articles based on a Pentagon study of how and why American involvement in the Indo-China war grew to its peak commitment of forces totaling half a million men.

The "Times" articles included classified documents submitted to President Johnson by advisers such as Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, Director John A. McCone of the Central Intelligence Agency and White House aides McGeorge Bundy and Walt W. Rostow; also texts of decisions to be implemented through the National Security Council and Joint Chiefs of Staff.

A bombshell effect—which Government officials now expect to be felt for months—increased with publication, on June 14 and 15, of the second and third articles in a scheduled multipart series.

Expanding repercussions. Disclosures of secret decisions on U. S. strategy touched off bursts of anger in Congress and in foreign capitals and brought unprecedented action by the Nixon Administration.

The Department of Justice sought an injunction banning further publication of material obtained by "The Times" on the ground that it would cause "irreparable injury to the defense interests of the United States."

On June 15, U. S. District Judge Murray J. Gurfeln, in New York, issued a restraining order halting publication of the articles, pending arguments and a ruling on the Government's

demand for a permanent injunction. White House officials said action was taken against "The Times" not only because U. S. interests were damaged, but for the further reason that publication of classified documents, if unchallenged, would set a dangerous precedent.

"Responsibility to publish." Gist of the stand taken by "The Times" was expressed in an editorial on June 16, in these words:

"A fundamental responsibility of the press in this democracy is to publish information that helps the people of the United States to understand the processes of their own Government, especially when those processes have been clouded over in a veil of public dissimulation and even deception."

While the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other arms of the Government sought to fix responsibility for the leak of the secret material to "The Times," diplomatic and congressional reverberations continued.

Secretary of State William P. Rogers told a news conference on June 15 that

publication of the articles was a violation of the law on secret documents and a "very serious matter" that would cause a "great deal of difficulty" for the U. S. in its relations with foreign governments.

Mr. Rogers said that the State Department had received diplomatic inquiries from other governments expressing concern about the articles and raising questions as to whether those governments could be sure of dealing with the U. S. on a confidential basis.

"Deliberate escalation." The Communist world was quick to react. The Soviet news agency, Tass, asserted that the documents published in the "Times" series "confirm the United States deliberately escalated and broadened the war in Indo-China, and misled the American public in giving its reasons for doing so."

In Australia—which has contributed troops to the Vietnam war effort—"The Sydney Daily Mirror" declared in an editorial that the secret Pentagon papers "show that while President Johnson was winning friends with his apparent sincerity and humanity he was, at the same time, provoking North Vietnam into an escalated war."

The Paris newspaper "France Soir" said the "Times" articles show that "in order to attack North Vietnam" Mr. Johnson "misled Congress."

On Capitol Hill, sharp comment came from Senator Barry Goldwater (Rep.), of Arizona, who was Lyndon Johnson's opponent in the 1964 presidential race.

Senator Goldwater said during the 1964 campaign that Mr. Johnson



President Johnson and Defense Secretary McNamara. Series in "Times" focused on top-level documents that shaped strategy.

Approved For Release 2001/03/04 : CIA-RDP80-01601R0003003601129

continued

Pentagon Papers: The Secret War

To see the conflict and our part in it as a tragedy without villains, war crimes without criminals, lies without liars, espouses and promulgates a view of process, roles and motives that is not only grossly mistaken but which underwrites deceptions that have served a succession of Presidents.

—Daniel Ellsberg

THE issues were momentous, the situation unprecedented. The most massive leak of secret documents in U.S. history had suddenly exposed the sensitive inner processes whereby the Johnson Administration had abruptly escalated the nation's most unpopular—and unsuccessful—war. The Nixon Government, battling stubbornly to withdraw from that war at its own deliberate pace, took the historic step of seeking to suppress articles before publication, and threatened criminal action against

that the Government was fighting so fiercely to protect. Those records afforded a rare insight into how high officials make decisions affecting the lives of millions as well as the fate of nations. The view, however constricted or incomplete, was deeply disconcerting. The records revealed a dismaying degree of miscalculation, bureaucratic arrogance and deception. The revelations severely damaged the reputations of some officials, enhanced those of a few, and so angered Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield—a long-patient Democrat whose own party was hurt most—that he promised to conduct a Senate investigation of Government decision making.

The sensational affair began quietly with the dull thud of the 486-page Sunday New York Times arriving on doorsteps and in newsrooms. A dry Page One headline—VIETNAM ARCHIVE: PEN-

John Mitchell charged that the Times's disclosures would cause "irreparable injury to the defense of the United States" and obtained a temporary restraining order to stop the series after three installments, worldwide attention was inevitably assured.

A Study Ignored

The Times had obviously turned up a big story (see PRESS). Daniel Ellsberg, a former Pentagon analyst and superhawk-turned-superdove, apparently had felt so concerned about his involvement in the Viet Nam tragedy that he had somehow conveyed about 40 volumes of an extraordinary Pentagon history of the war to the newspaper. Included were 4,000 pages of documents, 3,000 pages of analysis and 2.5 million words—all classified as secret, top secret or top secret-sensitive.

The study was begun in 1967 by Sec-



JULY 1965: JOHNSON DISCUSSING VIET NAM POLICY BEFORE TELEVISION SPEECH
Always the secret option, another notch, but never victory.

the nation's most eminent newspaper.

The dramatic collision between the Nixon Administration and first the New York Times, then the Washington Post, raised in a new and spectacular form the unresolved constitutional questions about the Government's right to keep its planning papers secret and the conflicting right of a free press to inform the public. The Government's action was to refrain from comment so as not to give the series any greater "exposure." But when Attorney General

TAGON STUDY TRACES 3 DECADES OF GROWING U.S. INVOLVEMENT—was followed by six pages of deliberately low-key prose and column after gray column of official cables, memorandums and position papers. The mass of material seemed to repel readers and even other newsmen. Nearly a day went by before the networks and wire services

retary of Defense Robert McNamara, who had become disillusioned by the futility of the war and wanted future historians to be able to determine what had gone wrong. For more than a year, 35 researchers, including Ellsberg, Rand Corporation experts, civilians and uniformed Pentagon personnel, worked out of an office adjoining McNamara's. With the able to obtain Pentagon documents dating back to arguments within the Truman Administration on whether the U.S. should help

28 JUN 1971
ast 2001/03/04 - CIA-RDP80-01601R000300360112-9

As Lyndon Johnson Sees It

The man in the eye of the storm, Lyndon B. Johnson, maintained a calm, and some thought stoic, silence last week, turning away interviewers who wanted his reaction to the top-secret Pentagon study of his stewardship of the war. From Austin, he passed the word that "all questions" raised by the Pentagon papers would be answered in his own book, "The Vantage Point," to be published next fall and that he was making "no changes" in the galleys to accommodate the new disclosures. But behind his silence, Johnson was naturally concerned about the study and its treatment in the press. Those in Austin privy to his feelings sketch this picture:

The ghostly hand of Robert Kennedy is on the Pentagon study. Bobby indeed may well have inspired the report. He was close to Robert McNamara and



Johnson, 1971: Ammunition in Austin

he needed an issue for his intended challenge to Johnson in 1968. He couldn't find any weakness in the Johnson record on civil rights, race, health, education, environment or anything else. He pinned his hopes on Vietnam, and McNamara was a Kennedy man. In fact, the whole Pentagon Establishment was Kennedy. Johnson left it intact. He trusted McNamara—in fact told him once that if McNamara quit he would have him arrested and brought back.

McNamara, while in the process of becoming disillusioned with the war, went to the Kennedy Center in Cambridge, Mass., and talked with about twenty Harvard professors around the time he ordered the study. Some of those twenty may be among the authors of the report—somebody should find out who they are and who wrote what. They were already committed. They couldn't make an objective report. They didn't try to get

White House and State Department records, which shows they didn't try very hard. If they were honest they would have disqualified themselves.

Some of The New York Times digest of the Pentagon study was objective. But parts of it might have been written by John Kenneth Galbraith. Over all, it was dishonest—one distorted and biased side of the picture. And all the circumstances surrounding the leak come close to treason. The danger now is that President Nixon will be pressured to get out of Vietnam before achieving the main objective—getting South Vietnam in shape to protect itself.

One of Johnson's big headaches when he took over the Presidency and the war effort was the political instability of the government in Saigon following the overthrow and murder of President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963. One of the first things Johnson did was to call in McNamara, Dean Rusk, CIA director John McConc and Henry Cabot Lodge—all JFK holdovers—and object to what had been done. While JFK was out of Washington, a cable from Roger Hilsman, the State Department's director of Intelligence and Research, gave "a green light" for the coup. That was inexcusable.

The Senators

Critics now were trying to make it seem that he had decided in 1964 to bomb in 1965, that his campaign was a lie and that he was trying to put something over on Congress. That just wasn't so. There were contingency plans for Vietnam. There are contingency plans for bombing Moscow; that doesn't mean that Moscow is going to be bombed. Johnson always insisted on consulting the Senate about major moves. Georgia's Richard Russell, the late chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and Arkansas's J. William Fulbright, chairman of Foreign Relations, always knew what the Administration was doing. Russell said so, but Fulbright conveniently forgot.

The first Gulf of Tonkin resolution actually was prepared by Senate leaders. But it was too complicated to be understandable, and Johnson objected. So the senators asked the Administration to prepare a simplified version and said they would adopt it. They all participated. The government had radio intercepts showing that North Vietnam ordered torpedo attacks on the U.S. destroyers in Tonkin Gulf. Fulbright has forgotten that, too—now he claims it was all a fraud—but he knew it at the time. The resolution authorizing Johnson to do what he thought needed doing from then on was adopted unanimously by the House and with two opposing votes in the Senate. The two dissenters may have been wrong, but they were at least honest

The military wanted Johnson to bomb long before he did. But both McNamara

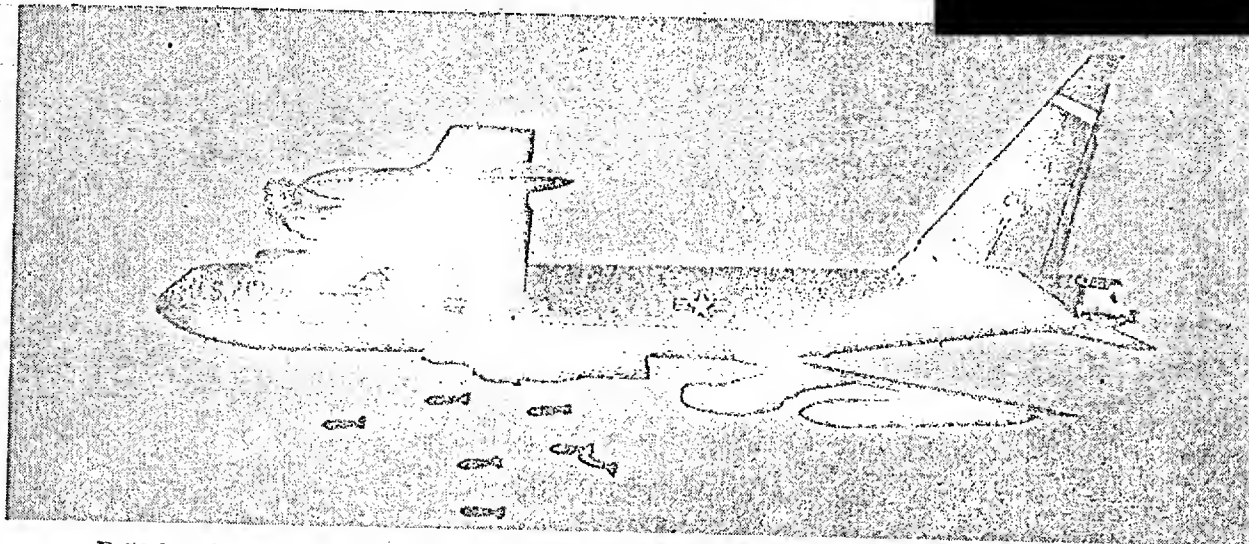
and Rusk were against it for a long time, and Johnson went with them. He vetoed the military recommendation on five different occasions—in November and December 1964 and on Jan. 2, 1965. Finally, on Feb. 7, 1965, with the approval of everybody concerned, he OK'd the bombing with the idea that it would be a deterrent to the north. [Johnson's recollection now is at variance with at least one past version. Five years ago, he told NEWSWEEK's Charles Roberts, then the magazine's White House correspondent, that he had made the decision in October 1964 during the Presidential campaign.] He hadn't said in his campaign that he would never commit Americans to fight in Vietnam. In New Hampshire, he said that Asians should fight their own wars, but in context he wasn't promising not to help.

The Deserter

In January 1965, McNamara and George Bundy were urging strong measures against North Vietnam. They argued that the time had come for full use of American power. Either get in or get out, they said. At that point, Rusk didn't agree with them. He wasn't for getting out but neither was he for a big escalation. He finally did agree with McNamara and Bundy the following June and July, and Johnson issued the orders. Everybody agreed by then. Some became disillusioned even before leaving the government. Bundy was the first to abandon ship and McNamara was next. It might have been weakness of character.

Lately Clark Clifford has been saying that he had orders from Johnson only to find out how to escalate further. But Johnson has a copy of his order to Clifford—initialed by Clifford when he received it—telling him to make a broad study of all alternatives. He also has copies of orders Clifford gave to subordinates to pursue possibilities other than escalation.

His own book, in fact, draws on 31 million documents on file at the LBJ library. Included in the collection are several memos from men such as Bundy, Clifford and McNamara, urging a stepped-up war effort. One of his favorites, already surfaced in the Times, shows McNamara proposing on March 16, 1964—five months before the Tonkin Gulf incident and eleven months before the Viet Cong attack on Pleiku—that the U.S. should be ready for "retaliation" against North Vietnam on three days' notice. Another shows that Bundy, in Saigon at the time of the Pleiku attack, came back to Washington urging "sustained reprisal" bombing attacks against North Vietnam, the policy Johnson adopted. And the former President has a memorandum showing that Clifford—as late as March 4, 1968—was recommending "no new peace initiatives" on Vietnam and advocating the callup of reserves. Johnson has a pretty good pile of ammunition—and his book will make pretty good use of it.



B-52 bomber raid in 1965: Early in the war, the U.S. ran out of alternatives to pressure

STATINTL

The War According to the Pentagon Papers

The secret Vietnam study commissioned by Robert McNamara is a historian's dream and a statesman's nightmare. With the story splashed on page one, Americans have for the first time been able to read some of the crucial secret documents of a war that is still being fought. The Pentagon papers are, at best, only an incomplete account of America's slide into the Vietnam quagmire. But they are also a revealing—and deeply disturbing—account of the delusions, deceptions and honest errors of judgment that propelled the United States into a destructively unpopular war.

The initial installments published by The New York Times and The Washington Post transfixed some members of Lyndon Johnson's Administration in a merciless spotlight. McNamara labors on as the war's most tireless technocrat even after he has begun to lose heart for the fight. Walt Whitman Rostow elings doggedly to the assumption that America is simply too powerful to be thwarted. Maxwell Taylor, the humanist general for whom Robert Kennedy named one of his sons, blusters like a pouty proconsul. And the Bundy brothers grind out options to order, while generals and admirals constantly promote the idea that more is better.

Other reputations gain from the exposure. George Ball's standing as a prescient dove is enhanced by the tone of his memorandums, and the intelligence services—particularly the CIA—weigh in with advice that, in retrospect, often seems to have been dead right. The spotlight skips over still other key policymakers. Dean Rusk figures only rarely in most of the narrative. And except for brief appearances, the most important actor of all—Lyndon Johnson—broods alone in the middle distance.

The material that was made public covers a period beginning in 1954, when the Kennedy years and focuses on

the wartime Johnson era. But even when it concentrates on the LBJ years, the Pentagon study is by no means the final word. It provides a fascinating peek into the government's files, but it contains few White House or State Department records of the period. It also draws on few of the private memorandums that McNamara, Rusk and others wrote for the President, and it shows no trace of the many private, soul-searching conversations between top officials. Flawed as a current account, the study is no less seriously flawed as a retrospective because the Pentagon analysts were not permitted to interview the principal players in the drama.

But despite those shortcomings, the study is invaluable. The Eisenhower era material—first printed in The Washington Post—strikes many of the notes that were to echo throughout America's involvement in Vietnam. There is the strong assumption that the stakes extend beyond Indochina to all of Asia, and that the U.S. is embroiled in a proxy confrontation with Communist China. There are the efforts to solve problems by backstage maneuvering. And, above all, there is Washington's repeated inability to make events in Indochina conform to its desires.

A Vote Against Elections

In 1954, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles fought hard but unsuccessfully at the Geneva conference on Indochina to prevent the scheduling of elections in Vietnam which, he feared, "might eventually mean unification [of] Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh." But despite Dulles's strong stand, the U.S. backed away from taking overt action on its own in Indochina. In 1955, when South Vietnamese strongman Ngo Dinh Diem refused even to consider holding elections, Washington's analysis declares: "The U.S. did

not—as is often alleged—connive with Diem to ignore the elections." And although Dwight Eisenhower permitted the military to draw up contingency plans for American intervention in Laos and Vietnam, he decided against such a step when Dulles failed to line up support from America's allies.

By the time Lyndon Johnson took office, the situation in South Vietnam had worsened. Diem had been assassinated, and the sad series of revolving-door juntas that followed him were fast losing their grip on the country. "We should watch the situation very carefully," Defense Secretary McNamara wrote in December 1963 after a visit to South Vietnam, "running scared, hoping for the best, but preparing for more forceful moves if the situation does not show early signs of improvement." This concern was by no means confined to secret government deliberations. By March 1964, Sen. J. William Fulbright was warning Congress that there were "only two realistic options open to us in Vietnam in the immediate future: the expansion of the conflict in one way or another or a renewed effort to bolster the capacity of the South Vietnamese to prosecute the war successfully on its present scale." And as the mood of crisis deepened, many newspapers—including The New York Times—warned against the possible loss of South Vietnam to the Communists.

But although the American people were well aware that things were going badly in South Vietnam—an awareness that would be heightened during the Goldwater-Johnson election campaign—a whole spectrum of undercover activities was kept secret from them. The Pentagon papers show that on Feb. 1, 1964, "an elaborate program of covert military operations against the state of North Vietnam" was authorized under the code name Operation Plan 34A. Directed from

continued

BY STEWART ALSOP



'BREACH OF SECURITY'

WASHINGTON — It is interesting — and rather wryly amusing — to juxtapose a couple of editorials that have appeared in The New York Times. One appeared on June 16 after a Federal judge ordered the Times to suspend publication of the top-secret Pentagon studies of the U.S. role in Vietnam.

The Times called this "an unprecedented example of censorship," which indeed it is. But then, the verbatim publication of great masses of top-secret papers is also unprecedented.

"What was the reason that impelled The Times to publish this material in the first place?" the Times asks rhetorically. "The basic reason is, as was stated in our original reply to Mr. Mitchell, that we believe 'that it is in the interest of the people of this country to be informed'..." The editorial continues on that lofty note: "We publish the documents and related running account not to prove any debater's point... but to present to the American public a history—admittedly incomplete—of decision-making at the highest levels of government..."

The other editorial, which was even more righteously outraged, appeared in the Times some years ago. It was entitled "Breach of Security," and it denounced an article "purporting to tell what went on in the executive committee of the National Security Council... The secrecy of one of the highest organs of the United States has been seriously breached."

'MC CARTHY TECHNIQUE'

"What kind of advice can the President expect to get under such circumstances?" the Times asked, again rhetorically. "How can there be any real freedom of discussion or of dissent; how can anyone be expected to advance positions that may be politically unpopular or unprofitable? Does no one in Washington recall the McCarthy era and the McCarthy technique? ... The various positions of the members of the NSC taken during deliberation must remain secret... The integrity of the National Security Council, and of the advice received by the President, is at stake."

The article that inspired the Times to this burst of righteous indignation was a Saturday Evening Post piece on the Cuban missile crisis by Charles Bartlett and this writer. It too was an attempt to "prove what they are intended to

—of decision-making at the highest levels of government." Although the Times, fortunately, could not know it at the time, the article had been read in advance (and rather badly edited) by no less an authority on national security than the President of the United States. It contained no word from any NSC paper, or from any other secret document.

REASONS—AND REASONS

The writers' reasons for writing the article were perhaps less lofty than those claimed by the Times in its recent editorial. They included a desire to do a good reportorial job (the account was later confirmed in detail in Robert Kennedy's book on the Cuban crisis). They even included a desire to make a bit of money. But like most reporters, we also believed that "it is in the interest of the people of this country to be informed..."

No doubt a desire to inform the people was a major reason for the Times's decision to publish the secret papers. But (to adopt the Times's own rhetorical style) might there not have been other reasons too? Does it not matter a great deal to the Times who does the informing? Is it not the Times's criterion that if the Times does the informing, that is in the national interest, and if somebody else does it, that is "a breach of security"?

And is the Times really indifferent to whether or not the information, which it is "in the interest of the people of this country" to publish, supports the views of the Times? The article that so enraged the Times pictured the late Adlai Stevenson, then a major Times icon, in a somewhat dubious light, and that perhaps had something to do with the rage. The Times has long passionately supported the cause that the leaking of the Pentagon papers was obviously intended to serve.

The purloined papers printed by the Times were first offered to Sen. George McGovern and Rep. Paul McCloskey, the leading doves in the Senate and House. Obviously, the purpose of the leak was to prove that this country became involved in Vietnam by a process of stealthy deception; and that therefore the United States should withdraw forthwith, leaving the South Vietnamese to their fate.

And is the Times really indifferent to whether or not the information, which it is "in the interest of the people of this country" to publish, supports the views of the Times? The article that so enraged the Times pictured the late Adlai Stevenson, then a major Times icon, in a somewhat dubious light, and that perhaps had something to do with the rage. The Times has long passionately supported the cause that the leaking of the Pentagon papers was obviously intended to serve.

prove. Allowing for the need for contingency planning, and allowing also for Lyndon Johnson's well-known passion for concealment, there is less deception of the public in the documents than self-deception.

There is the ancient American illusion that wars can be won cleanly in the air, rather than bloodily on the ground, of course. But the basic self-deception was the illusion that, if the United States could only find the right combination of sticks and carrots, the Vietnamese Communists would (in Robert McNamara's phrase) "move to a settlement by negotiation." The unswerving goal of the Communists, then and now, was and is the imposition of Communist rule on all former French Indochina. There is no stick short of "bombing them back to the stone age," and no carrot short of turning Saigon over to their tender mercies, that will divert them from that goal.

No American President who was also an honorable and humane man could hit them with that stick, or offer them that carrot. Yet the illusion that the North Vietnamese are capable of "reasonable" compromise is amazingly persistent, especially among liberal Democrats—its most recent manifestation is the "Clifford Plan," strongly supported by the Times.

NONSENSE

Despite its ineffable self-righteousness, the Times is certainly a great paper, though not as great as when it had the Herald Tribune to worry about. Moreover, anyone who has been around Washington for some time knows that a lot of governmental nonsense has been perpetrated in the name of "security." Most reasonably diligent reporters, including this one, have been investigated by the government for publishing information the government found it inconvenient to have published.

Yet surely there is a problem of security worth worrying about when "the various positions of the members of the NSC," as well as National Intelligence Estimates and secret coded messages from foreign governments, are reproduced verbatim in great quantities. Indeed, the Times series, by the Times's own standards, is the most serious "breach of security" in modern history. Yet those who wait for the government to announce this particular breach will have a long wait.